THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE DECIAN-VALERIAN PERSECUTIONS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH HISTORY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE, 1931

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INTRODUCTION

I. Problem and method of thesis.

The problem of this thesis is to show that economic factors constitute a major premise in understanding the genesis of the early Christian persecutions and especially those persecutions occurring during the reigns of the emperors Decius to Valerian. The delineation of events forms no part of this thesis, as such can be readily obtained from various works on the persecutions. The emphasis upon social and economic factors in the interpretation of history is a modern interest and the latter, particularly, have had no adequate presentation in the studies of the early persecutions.

In taking up this problem it will be necessary first of all to indicate briefly the economic background of the Roman Empire during the third century A.D., at the middle of which our special period falls. A further introductory problem will be to signify the economic status of Christianity in the third century A.D. The main problem will consist of the presentation of the economic factors in the popular hostility to Christianity and the economic elements in the imperial actions of Decius, Gallus, Valerian and Gallienus.

II. Factors in the economic decline of the third century.

The economic crisis of the third century has been too thoroughly studied and is too well known to need more than a passing mention in this connection. Attention should be called merely to a few of the principle elements.

1. Decrease in commerce, trade, and manufacture.

The century was marked by a decline in commerce and trade, both domestic and foreign, and a localization of industry with the accompanying economic losses, speculation, and fluctuation in the rate of interest.[1]

2. Decline of agriculture.

The decay of agriculture undermined the productivity of the empire and constituted an important factor in the general deterioration of the third century.[2]

3. Depopulation.

Depopulation is always both a cause and a consequence of economic decline and such was the case in the Roman Empire.[3]

4. Invasions.

The empire was seriously and repeatedly attacked from every quarter and the consequent devastations and economic losses incurred constituted a serious menace to the welfare of the Roman world.[4]

5. Earthquakes, floods, famines, and plagues.

Physical disasters of all kinds were a prominent feature in the economic background of the third century. They destroyed cities, crops, and whole sections of the population.[5]

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1. Rostovtzeff, M., The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Oxford, 1926), pp.419-421,425.
2. Simkovitch, V.G., Rome's Fall Reconsidered. Pol.Sc.Quarterly. 31:201-243.
3. Davis, W.S., The Influence of Wealth in Imperial Rome (N.Y. 1910), pp.324-328.
4. Gibbon, E., The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Chandos Classics. London, 1894), Vol.I. pp.191-208.
5. Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica. VII.21,22. Pontius, Vita Caecilii Cypriani, 9. Healy, P.J., The Valerian Persecution (N.Y. 1905), pp.92-97.

6. Debasement of the coinage.

The corruption of the medium of exchange was both an effect and a cause of economic depression. It was marked in the third century by the deterioration of the gold standard and a rapid rise in the prices of the commodities of life.[1]

7. Political chaos.

The third century saw considerable periods of political anarchy which drained the empire of its resources and turned taxation into systematic confiscation.[2]

8. Consequent economic status of the empire.

The consequent status of the empire was most melancholy. Brigandage and piracy returned on a large scale. Wild speculation was rampant and prices of the necessities of life soared. A most dismal picture of economic decline is drawn by Cyprian in his address to Demetrianus.[3] Such was the economic status of the Roman Empire in the times of Decius and Valerian.

III. The economic status of Christianity in the third century.

Extensive work has already been done in regard to the economic status of Christianity in the third century and hence it will be necessary only to cite the bases for that status with the elucidation of certain items.

1. Numerical strength.

Just what the numerical strength of Christianity became in the third century is a moot question of great difficulty but while absolute estimates are doubtful and unsatisfactory

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1. Homo, L., L'Empire romain (Paris, 1925), pp. 346-350.
2. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit. pp. 381-415.
3. Cyprian, ad Demetrianum. 3, 7, 8, 10.

and widely variant there is no question about the fact that Christianity rapidly became, by its numerical strength alone, a powerful economic unit in society.[1]

2. Property and funds of the church.

The evidence for real estate in the hands of the Christian church prior to 250 A.D. is very uncertain but the holdings of the church were extensive by the end of the third century and were very probably considerable by the middle of the two hundreds.[2] Ample evidence is available however to show that the Christian community collected large sums for charitable enterprises of various kinds, employing standing treasuries as well as special offerings.[3] Such operations could only have been carried forward by means of a large and prosperous constituency.

3. Christian attitude toward work.

The economic prosperity of any group in the social organization is to a very large extent dependent upon the prevailing attitude toward remunerative employment. Social groups have repeatedly discovered that the religious sanction of daily work has produced marked economic returns. Such was true in the early Christian communities. The Christian insistence upon conscientious labor is well known and was an important factor in the prosperity of the Christian society.[4]

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1. Harnack, A., The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (N.Y. 1908) Vol. II. pp. 89-306, 324-327.
2. Harnack, A., op. cit. Vol. II. pp. 85-88.
3. Tertullian, Apologeticus, 39. Eusebius, H.E. VI. xlii. 4. Cyprian, Epistolae, XLVII(50), XLVIII.1(52), LXIX.3(62), IV.1(5). Harnack, A., op. cit. Vol. I. pp. 147-198. Baudrillart, A., La Charité (Paris, 1903), pp. 40-42.
4. Didache, 12. Ignatius, Ep. to Philad. 4. Apostolic Constitutions, II.63, IV.2, 11.

4. The wealth of individual Christians.

It is of course axiomatic that if the Christian society was well-to-do it must have counted in its membership large numbers of well-to-do citizens. But the evidence for the wealth of individual Christians is too extensive and important to be overlooked in this connection, especially since we feel that certain elements in the evidence have not received sufficient emphasis. There are many references in the literature of the second and third centuries which point directly to wealthy members of the church.[1] In addition to this direct evidence there is much material in the writings of the Fathers with regard to luxury and extravagance that constitutes indubitable testimony to the even extreme wealth of many members of the Christian society.[2] Of similar import is the fact that by the middle of the third century Christians were to be found in large numbers in every stratum of society, including the highest.[3] In this connection the problem of the church in regard to those who "lapsed" is informing. Already in Tertullian's day there were many Christians who bought themselves off from persecution, and even whole churches purchased immunity.[4] But in the Decian persecution literally thousands broke faith with the church.[5] And those who apostatized were not confined

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1. Hermas, Similitudines, 1, 2. Clement, Paedagogus, II.13, Quis dives salvetur? Tertullian, de cultu Feminarum, II.9. Cyprian, de Opere et Eleemosynis, 9-11, 13-15, 19.
2. Hermas, Mandata, XII.2, Simil. VI.2, 4, 5. Clement, Paed. II.1-3, 9, 11, 13, III.6-12. Tertullian, de Cul. Fem. II.1-13. Commodianus, Instructiones, 59, 60. Apos. Const. I.3, 8.
3. Harnack, A., op.cit. Vol. II. pp. 33-84.
4. Tertullian, de Fuga in Persecutione, 5, 12, 13, Scorpiace, 1.
5. Eusebius, H.E. VI. xli.11-13. Cyprian, de Lapsis, 7-9.

to the laity but were found among the higher clergy as well.[1] Cyprian definitely asserts that the principle causes of apostasy were economic.[2] It is important to note that these persons who had compromised their religious position sought, nevertheless, to maintain their status in the Christian community.[3] Since many if not most of these had fallen because of the fear of the loss of their worldly possessions it is reasonable to infer that they sought to maintain themselves in good standing with the Christian community, to a considerable extent or in many cases, because of the economic advantage to be derived from such a solidarity. Cyprian definitely accuses such a bishop of purely selfish motives.[4] The indication of this evidence is that wealthy individuals found it to be to their advantage to belong to the Christian church. Powerful corroboration of this inference is to be found in the prevalent corruption and worldliness of the church.[5] The community contained many members who apparently made little effort to live up to the high standard of Christian morality. Even some leaders in the church like Felicissimus and Novatus were men of disreputable character.[6] Many of the "lapsed" were unrepentant and continued to live worldly and ostentatious lives.[7] Even more indicative of the worldly and commercial tone of many Christian

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1.Cyprian,Ep.LXIII.3(65), LXVII.1,6(67).
2.Cyprian,de Lapsis,11,12,35, de Mortalitate,1.
3.Cyprian,de Lapsis, 15,16,Ep.II(8),IX(16),X(15),XII(18),XIII (19),XXVI(33),LII(56),LIII(57).
4.Cyprian,Ep.LXIII.3(65).
5.Cyprian,de Lapsis,5,6.
6.Cyprian,Ep.XXXVII.2(41),LIV.1(59),XLVIII.2(52),V.3(14),VI. 4(13),VII.1(11). Apos.Const.I.9.
7.Cyprian,de Lapsis,30,32,33.

societies are the secular lives and interests of many of the bishops.[1] Equally significant and more startling is the situation revealed in Cyprian's letter concerning certain virgins of the church and his treatise on the dress of virgins.[2] The problem of the virgins was a pressing one before and after Cyprian's day but the situation which he discloses marks a definite deterioration in moral tone and religious idealism. The brazen worldliness and wealth of many "virgins" who refused to accept admonition to mend their ways is positive proof that they were motivated by other than religious idealism. Whence came these groups of mercenarily minded persons into the church? We cannot understand this influx on the basis of purely religious motives. Only one conjecture seems possible. The church had attained to such a position of influence in the community that many people found it to be to their advantage to belong to the church. In many cases the references that have already been cited show definitely that the primary motive was economic and the opinion forces itself upon us that a very great number of so-called Christians became such because of its economic advantageousness.

All of this confirms our impression that by the year 250 the Christian society was a very potent element in the economic fabric of the Roman Empire. The economic status of Christianity was not only high, but nearing affluence.

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1. Cyprian, Ep. LXV.1(1), de Lapsis, 6. Apos. Const. II.6. Synod of Elvira, Canon, 19, 27.
2. Cyprian, Ep. LXI(4), de Habitu Virginum. cf. Hermas, Simil. IX. 10, 11.

CHAPTER I

ECONOMIC FACTORS IN POPULAR HOSTILITY

I. Introduction.

While it is not a part of the function of this thesis to establish the juridical basis of the persecutions of the first two hundred years, yet it is important to point out that, almost without exception, the actions taken against the Christians prior to the year 250 were not due to the aversion of the state but to popular hostility. There is ample evidence to support this point of view.[1] Four possible exceptions should be mentioned. It may be objected that the persecution under Nero was due to imperial action and, in a sense, that is true, but it was odium already attaching to the Christian name in the mind of the masses that made the action of Nero feasible. It is in a class by itself and falls neither under the head of imperial action nor mob violence. Its instigation is to be found primarily in the personal character of Nero. Again, the death of Domitian cut short the persecution that had been begun under his rule and threatened wide-spread suppression of Christianity. If it had continued it might have constituted imperial action against the Christians but, as under Nero, the personal element was an important factor in the situation and no final conclusion can be

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1. Plinius, Epist. X.96. Athenagoras, Legatio pro Christianis, 1. Eusebius, H.E. III.xxxii.1, xxxiii.2, V.i.7. Tertullian, Apologeticus, 37, 49, 50. Cyprian, Ep. LXXIV.10(75). Justin, I Apol., 68, II Apol. 3. See bibliography for secondary materials.

drawn. The situation under Septimius Severus is much more difficult to dispose of. Here we have the issue of an edict definitely in opposition to Christianity which aroused considerable persecution and resulted in some famous martyrdoms. But it is significant to note that the edict was not directed at Christianity as a whole and did not aim to exterminate it but merely to check its growth. Septimius Severus had been favorable to Christianity which had enjoyed nearly a century of relative peace with the result that the new faith was rapidly becoming a powerful element in society and of increasing importance to the state authorities. Hence Septimius Severus had more opportunity than any of his predecessors to observe the inherent danger to the state of the Christian organization. But Septimius Severus must have valued much too highly the large and influential body of Christians to have any desire to exterminate them. Nor had the time yet arrived in the financial affairs of the Empire when drastic action to save the state from total collapse seemed imperative. Therefore Septimius adopted the much milder method of inhibiting the increase of what must have seemed to him a cancerous growth in the body politic.[1] The fourth stumbling-block is the outbreak under the emperor Maximinus.[2] But this persecution was clearly not a policy of suppressing Christianity as such but of wiping out influential leaders under the former emperor and was only local and intermittent in its effect.[3]

1.See also Westcott,B.F.,The Two Empires (London,1909),p.135.
2.Eusebius,H.E.VI.28.
3.Westcott,B.F.,op.cit.p.152.

This powerful popular hostility to Christianity was still present with marked potency in the early years of our era. The persecution in Alexandria began months before the edict of Decius arrived and was carried on ruthlessly by an infuriated mob.[1] Cyprian was frequently demanded by the mob to be thrown to the lions.[2] He himself speaks of the raging populace[3] and refers to the popular hostility.[4] In writing to Cornelius he describes the situation under Gallus in which Cornelius, the bishop of Rome, has been demanded for the beasts and the clamours of the populace have broken out anew.[5] In the Passion of SS.James, Marian, et al. which occurred in the persecution of Valerian we have an account of mob hostility in Numidia.[6]

Because of the continuing potency of this factor it will be necessary for us to go with detail into the economic factors involved in this popular hostility. But the period under consideration witnessed almost a complete cessation of popular animosity toward Christianity. It cannot be maintained that this was universally true, for Christian influence had spread unequally in different provinces and so while a modus vivendi might be established in one province it might not in another. This explains the late appearance of popular hostility mentioned above in connection with the passion of James, et al. Numidia was farther west and Christianity had been slower

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1. Eusebius, H.E. VI.xli.1-8.
2. Pontius, Vita Cae.Cyp.7.
3. Cyprian, Ep.LII.1,2(56).
4. Cyprian, Ep.XXXV(7),IV.2(5)
5. Cyprian, Ep.LIV.6(59).
6. Passio SS.Jacobi,Mariani,et al.II.2,IV.3.

in its permeation. But it is the last illustration to be found of mob hostility. In the description of the plague in Carthage we find no hint of popular animus.[1] As mentioned above it is present at Rome under Gallus but that would be natural at the very heart of the pagan world. However, it does not appear again. In the Acts of S.Cyprian the friendliness of the heathen mob is in striking contrast to the former hostility,[2] and we read that Fructuosus, who was martyred under Valerian, was beloved by the heathen as well as the Christians.[3] It cannot be assumed, however, that popular feeling was entirely won over to the Christian side even by the time of Diocletian, for popular hostility must still have played a part. But almost without exception after the middle period of the third century the mob became a neutral factor in the Christian persecutions. The irresistible interplay of social forces instigated by the expansion of Christianity which had permeated every stratum of society by the year 250 and made Christianity a religion of the world, and especially the intimate contacts of the _familia_ which contained both pagans and Christians brought about the _modus vivendi_ between Christianity and the pagan social world which we find fully developed in the last half of the third century. These social forces will be further indicated in the discussion which follows.

1.Pontius, _Vita Cae.Cyp._9.
2._Acta S.Cypriani_,II.5,V.1,6.
3._Acta S.Fructuosi,et al_.III.1.

II. Economic factors in popular hostility.

1. Social and political friction.

(a) In the Roman social organization the familia consisted of more than husband, wife, and children; it included the entire domestic household and constituted a definite economic unit. When the encroachments of Christian propaganda split the familia into pagan and non-pagan elements, this disruption caused more than merely social disharmony; it interfered positively with the economic structure of the group. The prevalence of this rupture is one of the outstanding features of early Christianity. The attractiveness of Christianity to women and the predominance of women in the Christian society during these early centuries[1] account for the phenomenon of mixed marriages. If the woman was not already married to a pagan husband she would often either have to choose a pagan suitor, for none other was available, or else remain single. Cyprian deplores the prevalence of this marital intermingling of Christians and pagans[2] and advises against it.[3] The Synods of Elvira and Arles legislated against the marriage with pagans, Jews or Gentiles.[4] The very fact that a woman had adopted a faith that was alien to that of her husband destroyed the pagan ideal of the home. No wife ought to have any other friends than her husband's and no other religion, said Plutarch.[5] Such action on the part of one of the heads of the

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1. Harnack, A., op. cit. Vol. II. pp. 64-84.
2. Cyprian, de Lapsis, 6.
3. Cyprian, adversus Iudaeos, III. 62.
4. Synod of Elvira, Canon, 15, 16, 17. Synod of Arles, Canon, 11.
5. Plutarch, Coniugalia Praecepta, 19.

familia disrupted the family cult and endangered the prosperity of the group for we must remember that it was "an age of supernaturalism" when men sought and believed in supernatural aid in every undertaking and interest of life.[1] Thus the opposition that would be aroused by such ruptures would be to a large extent economic in causation. The difficulties incumbent upon mixed marriages are graphically depicted by Tertullian.[2] These difficulties are social, religious, and economic. The Christian wife is naturally desirous of showing as much liberality and charity as possible but the pagan husband just as naturally opposes such depletion of the family savings account. The pagan husband had occasion to be alarmed. Small wonder then that pagan husbands not uncommonly disowned their Christian wives.[3] It must not be assumed that the economic factors were the only elements involved in such situations as that was certainly not the case but the other elements do not constitute a part of this thesis; a fact that must be clearly borne in mind throughout this presentation. Christians were admonished to forsake parents, wives, husbands, or children if necessary to maintain the Christian faith, and to give up all idolatrous trades.[4] This has a definite economic bearing and such an attitude would be especially galling in a mixed marriage.

But the difficulty was not always occasioned by the

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1. Case, S.J., Experience with the Supernatural in Early Christian Times (N.Y.1929).
2. Tertullian, ad Uxorem, II.4-6. cf. Clement, Stromata, IV.19.
3. Tertullian, Apol.3, ad Nationes, I.4 Arnobius, adversus Nationes, II.5.
4. Tertullian, de Idololatria, 12. Clement, Quis div.sal.22, Strom.IV.8.

conversion of the female side of the household. There is an intimation, at least, that when Cyprian became a Christian he proceeded to dispose of a considerable portion of his property in the interest of his new cause, and that in spite of the objections of his wife![1] Cyprian himself urgently and repeatedly counsels the heads of Christian households not to abstain from almsgiving because they have families to provide for.[2] The inescapable inference is that there were many Christian gentlemen who were restricting their giving because they had wives to support and children to educate and felt the need to lay aside something for sickness or old age. But Cyprian's advice must have had considerable influence and in case the entire family were not Christian this jeopardizing of the family exchequer would cause a deal of trouble. Even if all of the members of the family were nominally Christian it does not follow that they would be willing to have their economic welfare endangered; we have shown above that many members of the Christian society were not troubled overmuch with sacrificial idealism.

There is another matter that would cause no little economic difficulty in the case of a pagan husband and a Christian wife. The practice of abortion and infanticide was wide-spread in the pagan world. The life of the newly born child lay at the mercy of the father. If birth had not been prevented by abortion and the child was undesirable in the eyes of the father it would be disposed of by exposure or other methods. The girl infants were the most usual victims

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1.Pontius, Vita Cae.Cyp.3.
2.Cyprian, de Op.et Elee.16-20.

of this procedure and the only conceivable basis for this action is economic. Now the Christian conscience abhorred this practice.[1] What would be the outcome when the Christian wife objected to the exposure of her infant daughter? Most certainly the pagan husband would know whence had come this marked change in the attitude of his wife; formerly she had acquiesced but now it was quite different. This economic difficulty must have engendered much hostility on the part of pagan husbands and their associates.

In the cases of families split between parents and children we find similar difficulties. In the well known account of Perpetua[2] there is drawn for us a graphic picture of a home split by the conversion of two of the children. No economic elements appear and none are necessarily implied but the causation of such a breach often did have pecuniary consequences. The Acts of Paul and Thecla[3] furnish a pertinent example. It does not matter whether the "Acts" are genuine or not since they were accepted as depicting a true situation and the writer believed them to be truly representative. In these Acts Thecla is persuaded by the preaching of Paul to renounce her approaching nuptials and remain a virgin. She was the daughter of wealthy but pagan parents and her betrothed was

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1. Abortion: Tertullian, Apol.9. Minucius, Octavius, 30. Athenagoras, Leg.pro Christ.35. Apoc.of Peter(M.R.James), B.26, cf.A.2,3. Infanticide: Justin, IApol.27,29. Ep.to Diognetus, 5. Tertullian, Apol.9, ad Nat.I.15. Minucius, Oct.30,31. Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christ.35. Clement, Paed.III.3, Strom.II.18. Origen, contra Celsum, VIII.55. Apoc.of Peter(M.R.James), A.1.
2. Passio SS.Perpetua et Felicitatis, 3-5.
3. Acta Pauli et Theclae, II.7-10.

probably also well-to-do. She had been betrothed by her mother and her refusal to go ahead with the arrangements caused her mother great consternation, and also the disdained suitor. It cannot be asserted that the mother's anguish was purely economic but neither can it be gainsaid that a "good" match for her daughter, as this seems to have been, would certainly be economically advantageous. On the other hand the marrying a daughter of a well-to-do family was not to be blithely rejected by any young man, regardless of the possible actual affection involved. Thus the refusal of Christian daughters to marry the choices of their pagan parents would antagonize two groups: the parents and the suitors. And this antagonism had a considerable economic foundation. But apart from this matter of advantageous marriages the disaffection of the children of the home would cause trouble. Eusebius gives us an account coming from the fourth century of a son who returned home from school only to find that he could not adjust himself to the existing conditions and left his home eventually to suffer martyrdom.[1] Tertullian and Arnobius tell us that sons were often disinherited or cast out.[2] The Clementine Homilies and Recognitions advise the separation offamilies where the parents are pagan, as the children would profit them nothing if they remained.[3] Many parents, then as now, depended upon their children to contribute to the family income. In many cases they must have constituted the only old age insurance available. When the son

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1. Eusebius, Martyrs of Palestine, IV.5.
2. Tertullian, ad Nat. I.4, Apol. 3. Arnobius, adv. Nat. II.5.
3. Clement, Homiliae, XI.19,20, Recognitiones, VI.4.

refused to learn or to continue in the pagan trade or occupation of his father, which was so often intimately linked up with idolatrous beliefs and practices, the father must have felt not only that he was losing a son but that his future welfare hung in the balance. What was more natural then than that the disobedient son should be angrily cast out or disinherited.

There is still another feature in the disruption of the familia which demands our attention. The familia of every well-to-do citizen contained a number, if not a large number, of slaves. Christianity early encroached upon this fruitful field for propaganda.[1] Paul Allard has given us an authentic description in a brief compass of the conditions in the Roman world with regard to slavery.[2] The situation was repeatedly at the breaking point and only a match was needed to set off the conflagration. The same author has shown the danger to this situation involved in the Christian doctrine of universal equality.[3] As a rule masters governed their slaves with an iron hand and it is to be expected that when they ascertained that any of them had taken up with a new "superstition" that taught absolute equality (and practiced it!) they would take drastic measures to let their slaves know their true position. Here was a closely knit organization instilling a psychology of equality very detrimental to slave economy and conducive to revolts and consequent economic disasters. The slave owners as a whole could hardly be expected to appreciate the fact

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1.Allard, P.,Les esclaves chrétiens(Paris,1914)
2.Allard,P.,op.cit.pp.155-166.
3.Allard,P.,op.cit.pp.166-184.

that actually Christianity was a force making for stability in this section of the social structure. As a matter of fact we have positive evidence that pagan masters did take drastic action against their Christian slaves. Tertullian tells us that pagan masters sent their Christian slaves to the slave prisons[1] and Arnobius informs us that Christian slaves were tortured by their masters.[2] In theory Christianity certainly threatened the breakdown of slave economy and this would be readily perceived by slave owners in the pagan world, with its consequent opposition.

Altogether the disruption of the familia by Christianity with its economic issues must have been a very important constituent in the causes of the popular hostility.

(b) The political friction engendered by the Christians' antipathy to public offices is not nearly so important a factor in its economic aspects as the above and yet it is worthy of consideration. It is to be remembered that a very high percentage of municipal income was derived from the voluntary beneficence of its citizens. This did not always pass through the municipal treasury but nevertheless was often expended on such humble needs as pavements and sewers. It also provided public buildings and entertainments. With the economic decline of the Roman world municipal offices became tremendous financial burdens.[3] The Christians were opposed to the holding of public offices on principle and because they were intricately

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1. Tertullian, ad Nat. I.4, Apol. 3.
2. Arnobius, adv. Nat. II.5.
3. Arnold, W.T., The Roman System of Provincial Administration (Oxford, 1914), pp. 244-265.

bound up with idolatry[1] and public entertainments to which they were opposed. The material on this matter is abundant and readily obtainable(see bibliography). The Christian could be justly accused of a lack of patriotic feeling and local interest.[2] He did not wish to be a king.[3] The Christians rejected public offices[4]and were accused of despising honors and purple robes.[5] The Christians were repeatedly accused of indolence in public affairs and urged to accept official positions.[6] From the fact that public office holding entailed extensive expenditure on behalf of the state and city it can be readily observed that the opposition aroused by the practice of wealthy Christians of refraining from public offices would have a definite economic aspect: the populace was deprived of entertainment and the city of administration and improvements.

The passing of the decades, the numerical expansion of Christianity, and the acclimatization of t he new movement in the social organization brought about a new understanding of the Christians themselves. The increasing number of mixed marriages with the enforced intimate contacts of the familia necessitated the evolution of mutual understandings and modes of adjustment. The Christians, moreover, came more and more to take a proportionate part in all social and political activities. If the Christians were avoiding the civic offices

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1.Tertullian, de Idol.17.
2.Pontius,Vita Cae.Cyp.11.
3.Tatian,Oratio ad Graecos,11.
4.Minucius,Octav.31.
5.Minucius,Octav.8.
6.Origen,con.Cel.VIII.68,74,75. Tertullian,de Pallio,5, Apol.38,42,46.

in the third century, so were the pagans and the indications are that their reasons for shunning such obligations were practically the same: the economic burden was too severe. Even the average man could perceive that there was no fundamental difference between the Christian who avoided his civic "duty" and the pagan who did the same. This is the explanation for the disappearance in large measure of political friction during the third century.

2. Ethical incompatibility.

The moral contrast between pagan and Christian society was sharp and penetrating. This is not to imply that there were not many individuals in the Roman world of high moral idealism but the tone of society as a whole was low,[1] while from the first the standard of Christian ethics had been high.[2] The Christians were hated because they abjured the heathen pleasures,[3] and the story told by Justin Martyr of the intemperate husband who was incensed by his Christian wife is easily understood.[4] It can hardly be maintained that this ethical incompatibility was in itself an economic factor in popular hostility but it did play an important part in the opposition of Christians to many pagan occupations which will be considered in detail under section six. By the time that the third century was beginning to wane Christian idealism had been

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1. Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christ. 34. Clement, Strom. 3. Justin, I Apol. 27, 29.
2. Justin, I Apol. 15, 16.
3. Ep. to Diognetus, 6.
4. Justin, II. Apol. 2. cf. Tertullian, Apol. 3, ad Nat. I. 4.

markedly compromised as we have shown above. In practice the ethical incompatibility between pagan and Christian was no longer so sharply defined and hence this cause of popular hostility was effectively neutralized.

3. General misunderstandings.

(a) What was undoubtedly one of the most important agents in arousing popular animosity can hardly be said to contain any economic residue. The prevalent misunderstanding of certain Christian rites and practices led the heathens to accuse the new religious sect of most revolting practices. Thus the common misinterpretation of the Christian love feast or agape led to charges of Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean intercourse.[1] These charges were corroborated in a small way by the actual practice by the Christians of the holy kiss. References are not lacking to show that it was not always "holy"![2] The popular hostility aroused by the circulation of these false reports and accusations was the outburst of righteous indignation against a supposedly depraved religious sect. But while that is true it does not explain the motives of those who stirred up these accusations. The attempt to demonstrate those motives would be a hopeless and fruitless undertaking but it is not at all improbable that economic considerations played their usual rôle. By the middle of the third

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1. Justin, I Apol. 26, II Apol. 12, 13, Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo, 10, 17. Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christ. 3, 31. Tertullian, ad Nat. I. 2, 7, Apol. 2, 4, 7, 8, 39. Minucius, Octav. 9. Eusebius, H.E. V. i. 14.
2. Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christ. 32. Apos. Const. II. 57, VIII. 11. Egyptian Church Order (see Connolly p. 182)

century steady Christian living and ever more intimate intermingling had largely dispelled the illusion of a "depraved" sect.

(b) Another matter to which the term "misunderstanding" can only be reservedly applied is the millenarianism of the Christian society. Only when the millennial hope of the new sect had become transformed into an expectation of social evolution can the animosity of pagan society be termed as due to a misunderstanding. In the early generations the Christian writers and preachers spoke with confidence and exultation of the coming day when all would be transformed, their enemies and all unbelievers would be overthrown, and the Christians would reign supreme in a glorified world. This view was prevalent even in the days of Cyprian who believed that the Lord would avenge the sufferings of the faithful and in the apocalyptic kingdom the believers would reign with Christ.[1] The economic significance of this teaching is almost too obvious to need expression. In a world in which pagans were to be visited with eternal damnation or subject to the yoke of Christian rulers, the former had nothing to gain and everything to lose. How important this matter was in stirring up hatred against the Christians it is impossible to say but its influence must have been considerable, especially among the uncultured masses. The firey maledictions of irresponsible radicals who would not be differentiated by the crowd from "orthodox" Christians must have contributed appreciably to the suspicion

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1. Irenaeus, adversus Haereses, V.ix.4, xxx.4, xxxii.1-xxxv.2 Tertullian, de Spectaculis, 30, Apol. 48, adversus Marcionem, III.24. Martyrdom of Paul (M.R.James), 2. Cyprian, Ep. LV.2, 7, 10 (58), de Dominica Oratione, 13, ad Demet. 17, 21, 22.

of the masses.[1]

4. Wide-spread superstition.

No consideration is more important in understanding the opposition to Christianity than the full comprehension of the intense and wide-spread superstition. This included belief in the magical arts, and in this belief in supernatural powers the Christians were one with the pagan world. Heathens and Christians alike sought a supernatural explanation for all untoward events such as floods, storms, famines, earthquakes, and plagues. To both, such disasters were caused by the displeasure of the Supernatural. The Christians as "atheists" in the opinion of the pagan world were constantly accused of angering the gods and thus causing the disastrous public calamities.[2] The Christians, on the other hand, tended to defend themselves in a measure by asserting that the disasters were due to the wickedness of the heathen which had angered the one true God.[3] These great physical disasters are always primarily economic. Even pestilences have their economic residue and in the other disasters the loss of life is directly dependent upon the economy of the calamity. Arnobius gives us an economic interpretation of these misfortunes[4] and tells us that the failure of the corn crop was often the cause of popular hostility.[5] Further delineation of this factor is unnecessary

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1. Origen, con. Cel. VII.9.
2. Tertullian, Apol. 40, ad Nat. I.9. Cyprian, Ep. LXXIV.10(75), ad Demet. 2,3. Eusebius, H.E. IV.xiii.1-7.
3. Tertullian, ad Scapulam, 3. Hermas, Simil. Vi.3. Cyprian, ad Demet. 6-11, 17, 21.
4. Arnobius, adv. Nat. I.1,3.
5. Arnobius, adv. Nat. I.16.

but its importance cannot be overemphasized. By the latter part of the third century the voice of Christianity was becoming numerically strong enough to make it apparent that there was no special visitation of the gods upon them and that perhaps they were not the sole cause of physical disasters after all. Then, the dispelling of common misunderstandings would tend to disarm this accusation; the Christians were not such a despicable people after all.

The matter of magic also enters into this consideration and no doubt the supposed evil influence of the Christians aroused much resentment among the devotees of sorcery and allied arts. The account given by Eusebius of the attitude of Macrianus is a case in point[1] but the economic aspects will be treated below under a different heading (Economic disruption).

5. Jewish animosity.

There was no more constant factor all through the early persecutions of the Christians than the Jewish animosity.[2] There was also no factor that was more genuinely religious in its genesis and propagation. But with Jewish nature as it is we may suggest that the Jewish opposition would take an economic form at every possible occasion and the hostility of the Christians for the Jews must have caused considerable economic embarrassment to the latter. The Christian attitude depicted by Shakespeare in The Merchant of Venice was probably just as characteristic of the early centuries. We have no

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1. Eusebius, H.E. VII.x.4.
2. Justin, I Apol. 31, Dial. cum Tryph. 17, 108. Passio Polycarpi, 12, 13, 17, 18.

doubt but that many an early Christian took unholy glee in depriving the Jew of his ducats.

6. Economic disruption.

So far we have been dealing with factors in which the pecuniary element is not at once apparent. We now come to the consideration of materials which are economic by their very nature. Our problem will be to show to what extent the conduct of Christians rent certain economic realms of social activity.

(a) There is considerable evidence, though not abundant, for the direct interference of the Christians with the heathen temples, we find in the writings of Origen a suggestion that some Christians were taking destructive action against idols,[1] and Pontius indicates that Cyprian ordered idols to be destroyed.[2] In the Acts of S.Polyeuctes[3] the martyr brings down the wrath of the government upon him by the violent destruction of idols. These acts are rather late but may refer to a genuine martyrdom of the third century. Workman gives some further examples of iconoclasm[4] and the Synod of Elvira felt called upon to pass a law that anyone who died as the result of the destruction of idols should not be considered a martyr.[5] Apparently such conduct was much too prevalent. Conybeare tells us that the iconoclasm of the Christians was pronounced

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1. Origen, con.Cel. VIII.38.
2. Pontius, Vita Cae.Cyp.17. This may be merely figurative speech and not refer to the actual destruction of idols.
3. Conybeare, F.C., Monuments of Early Christianity (N.Y.1894), p.141.
4. Workman, H.B., Persecution in the Early Church (London, 1906), pp.161-165.
5. Synod of Elvira, Canon, 60.

in the third century.[1] To whatever extent this activity occurred it constituted definite economic destruction and would necessarily arouse strong opposition.

The Christians also interfered with the temples in other ways. The situation in Bithynia-Pontus is enlightening.[2] We are told that the temples there had been deserted and the markets were at a stand still. Such interference with temple revenues would be certain to arouse violent hostility on the part of those concerned and this must have been the case to a greater or less degree wherever Christianity gained a firm foothold. Tertullian had to meet the accusation in his day that the temple revenues were daily falling off.[3] The Christians might seek to defend their conduct with regard to the heathen temples but that would not fill the empty coffers or satisfy those dependent upon them. Undoubtedly much animosity was aroused by this direct curtailment of temple prosperity.

(b) Closely allied with this phase of economic disruption was the Christian opposition to all trades and professions connected in any way with idolatry, directly or indirectly. This feature is such an outstanding characteristic of early Christianity that it needs no detailed delineation. The list of prohibited trades and professions leaves one wondering indeed what means the pious Christian could employ in order to earn a living.[4] A striking example of how the conduct of

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1. Conybeare, F.C., op.cit. pp.12,13.
2. Plinius, Epist. X.96.
3. Tertullian, Apol. 42.
4. Tertullian, de Idol. 4-6, 8-11, 19, de Corona, 11. Origen, con. Cel. VIII. 68, 73. Cyprian, Ep. LX(2). Apos. Const. VIII. 32. Egyptian Church Order (Connolly, p.181, 182). Canones Hippolyti, 11-13, 15.

Christians not only tended to cripple certain trades by their withdrawal but also hindered the remunerative practice of certain professions is seen in the account given by Lucian of Alexander of Abonutichus, the Oracle-Monger. By daring and deceit he had built up a very lucrative trade in oracles but he found that the presence of Christians or Epicureans interfered with his rites (and his profits!) and so he and his followers called upon all such persons to begone![1]

But Christians were never able to maintain this ideal of complete abstenance from idolatrous contacts and soon began to make various compromises and adjustments as the references cited in the Introduction conclusively show. The church had to be ever watchful to keep its membership as pure as possible from the poison of idolatry. Christians objected to the strictness of Tertullian: how were they to live?[2] Idol makers were even admitted to the ministry![3] Christians were to be found in increasing numbers in military service[4] and some of them employed a certain casuistry in defending the wearing of the military crown.[5] Hence this factor of opposition, while always potent, was never as powerful in stirring up animosity as the idealistic expressions of the leaders of the church would lead one to imagine.

(c) In the opposition of Christianity to anti-social occupations we find an attitude that would alienate what is

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1. Lucian of Samosata, Alexander the Oracle-Monger, 38.
2. Tertullian, de Idol. 12.
3. Tertullian, de Idol. 7.
4. Cadoux, C.J., The Early Church and the World (Edinburgh, 1925) pp. 276-280.
5. Tertullian, de Cor. 12.

always a powerful element in the social organization: the vice and gangster combine. The Christian, says Tertullian, takes pride in his opposition to such as pimps, panders, bath-suppliers, assassins, poisoners, sorcerers, soothsayers, diviners, astrologers.[1] This was the characteristic Christian attitude which we find expressed in various canons of the church.[2] The prevalence of these corrupting trades in Roman society[3] made these conflicts numerous and important. An interesting illustration of the opposition of white slavers to the Christians is found in the story of the maiden of Corinth and Magistrianus.[4] It is impossible to estimate the extent and the violence of this hostility but whatever its potency it was certainly based on economic considerations.

(d) Another prominent feature of early Christian social life was its aloofness from the world. The Christian idealists desired to keep the believers from all contact and association with pagans whether in business or pleasure.[5] Tertullian wishes that they might not even inhabit the same world.[6] It is not to be imagined that this ideal of aloofness was ever completely attained but it seems to have been more effective sometimes than even the idealists desired. The Christians were accused

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1. Tertullian, Apol. 43.
2. Canones Hippolyti, 15. Egyptian Church Order (Connolly, p. 181). Apost. Const. IV. 6, VIII. 32.
3. Lecky, W. E. H., History of European Morals (N.Y. 1880), Vol. I. pp. 262-264.
4. Hippolytus, Fragments.
5. Hermas, Man. X. 1, Sim. VIII. 9. Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christ. 35. Clement, Paed. III. 4, Strom. I. 8. Minucius, Octav. 12. Tertullian, Apol. 35, 38, de Idol. 15, de Cor. 1-15, de Spec. 1-30. Apost. Const. II. 62.
6. Tertullian, de Spec. 15.

of being useless in the affairs of life and there must have been real basis for the charge. Even Tertullian resents this accusation and seeks to refute it.[1] His is a classic treatment and worthy of the most careful consideration. The point that we wish to emphasize is that this chapter brings out in sharp outline the economic bearing of the withdrawal of the Christians from pagan society. They are accused of not engagin commerce or trade with pagans or purchasing a great many of the common articles offered for sale by the pagan merchants. The fact that Tertullian denies this accusation does not neutralize the effect that had been produced upon the popular mind, which was undoubtedly an important cause of the hostility of the populace.

We have already pointed out that the ideal of aloofness was never realized and while it was considerably effective through many generations the Christians came more and more to take their places in the commercial life of their day and to mingle and trade freely in the pagan world. The evidence that has already been presented in regard to the wealth of individual Christians has made this clear. Even Tertullian admitted, rather regretfully, that Christians were mingling pretty freely in the pagan social life.[2] Hence by the middle of the third century it was probably not so much the aloofness of the Christians that was causing trouble as the keen competition of these strange fanatics in the economic body!

(e) This matter of the competition of the Christians

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1. Tertullian, Apol.42. cf.Ep.to Diog.5. Origen, con.Cel.VIII.5.
2. Tertullian, de Spec.3,20,27, de Cor.8. cf.Revel.of John,2-4.

in the pagan world is our next consideration. The delineation of the typical Roman attitude toward remunerative labor and commerce need not detain us. The all but universal repugnance is detailed in various references given in the bibliography. It will, however, be pointed out below that this revulsion did not apply to a certain large class in Roman society which, we believe, constituted the chief power in competition with the new religionists. In contrast to the Roman attitude was the Christian insistence upon work as a duty; one should be ashamed of idleness.[1] Mr. Harmon has given us a discussion of the Christian point of view in his doctor's thesis which is adequate to our purpose.[2] We are more interested in seeing how this ideal worked itself out. The keener competition of the Christian in comparison with his pagan rival was based not only upon the Christian ideal of industry, honesty and frugality but equally vitally upon his better habits of daily living. The Christians were not yet as fortunate as the Jews who had a recognized holy day on which they were excused from labor in order to visit their houses of worship. The Christians had to meet for worship before or after their daily labor. They soon came to have special services once a week[3] but those who were employed by pagans, at least, had to work just the same. Consequently the Christian community assembled at sunrise for a brief service of worship and again after the day's work was done. There is abundant evidence to show that this

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1. Didache, 12. Ignatius, Ep. to Philad. 4. Apost. Const. II. 63.
2. Harmon, L.B., Economic Factors in the Triumph of Early Christianity (Chicago, 1928), pp. 77-83.
3. Plinius, Epist. X. 96.

was not only a weekly but a daily program of wide-spread practice all through the period which we are considering.[1] If the Christian was so situated that he could not attend some sunrise service or for some reason or other none was to be held he was urged to rise before daybreak nevertheless to read the scriptures and pray before going to work.[2] This practice, coupled with a high moral standard which included honesty, industriousness, and frugality, was bound to make the Christian a powerful and dangerous competitor in the labor market. The labor market in the Roman world was in a precarious state. The upper classes had only disdain for labor, trade, and commerce and relegated all such matters to their slaves. The proletariat had no industrious ideal. This made Christian competition all the more effective. The only redeeming element in the pagan situation was the freedmen.[3] The freedmen had learned industriousness, trades, and commerce while they were slaves and necessity had wiped out any innate aversion. They seem to have lived normal healthful lives by the heathen standard and rapidly came into virtual control of the economic affairs of the empire. Their numbers were constantly on the increase and while it is impossible to form any certain judgment it appears that they constituted the majority of the working population during the Christian era. It seems to us that this is the class with which the Christians came into

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1. Plinius, Epist. X.96. Ignatius, Ep. to Ephesians, 13. Justin, I Apol. 67. Tertullian, Apol. 2, de Cor. 3, ad Uxor. II.4. Eusebius, H.E. III.xxxiii.1. Apost. Const. II.59.
2. Egyptian Church Order (Connolly pp. 96, 100, 191, 192)
3. Some materials dealing with this problem will be found listed in the bibliogrpahy.

most active competition, they numbering many freedmen in their own group. But even the freedman could hardly compete successfully with the Christian for he too often dissipated his energies in riotous living. The Christian who was prompt (because he had arisen early to go to church), sober, frugal, honest, reliable, and efficient would naturally have the edge in any competitive market. The chances are that the Christian could find steady employment while the pagan would be drifting from one job to another. This would not make for a friendly attitude on the part of the pagan worker. The story of the stone masons who aroused the ire of their fellow workers[1] is an illustration in point though it comes from the fourth century. Celsus does not seem to have appreciated the Christian workers who were employed in pagan homes.[2] It would appear also that certain Christians entered into business enterprises which were in direct competition with their pagan neighbors and were dependent upon a pagan constituency to a considerable extent, otherwise their confession of the faith would not have ruined their business irrevocably.[3] It does not require a great stretch of the imagination to perceive how such competition would arouse considerable hostility. But Christians were not merely day laborers, artisans, traders, and retailers; they were also big business men. They carried on world-wide enterprises,[4] and there is even an indication that they may, at times, have cornered the grain market![5] The

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1. Workman, H.B., op.cit. pp.136,137.
2. Origen, con.Cel.III.55
3. Cyprian, Ep.XXXVII.1(41).
4. Cyprian, de Lapsis, 6.
5. Arnobius, adv.Nat.I.16.

possibilities for friction in such a situation are quite obvious. Its actuality may be taken for granted.

(f) When to the elements in the situation which we have just described we add the general prosperity of the Christian community which was pointed out in the Introduction and which would be apparent to the most common among common men, we have a combination making for the disruption of the economic welfare of those outside the Christian community which must have been a veritable thorn in the flesh of the economic body. The social solidarity of the new society is well known[1] and in fact is almost axiomatic from the very nature of the new religion. The Christian church had learned self-sufficiency and could hold its own in spite of the economic reverses of the third century which shook the very foundation of society.[2] In fact the Christian church was the only institution of the Roman world that had attained adequate economic stability and solidarity to be self-sufficient. As such it would be an object of jealousy on the part of all less fortunate groups in the social organization. It should be observed also that the solidarity of the Christian community would tend to make the individual member still more effective in his competitive activities.

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1. Justin, I Apol. 14, 67. Tertullian, Apol. 39.
2. The evidence for this is to be found in the charitable enterprises of the church which maintained themselves throughout the third century. See Introduction.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE IMPERIAL OPPOSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

I. Introduction.

In the middle of the third century A.D. the Roman Empire was tottering on the brink of complete economic disaster.[1] It would be apparent to any wide-awake citizen that immediate and drastic action was called for. In this situation the first imperial persecution of the Christians on a general scale was instigated. This of itself is significant, The Roman government was always anxious to maintain peace and order in the empire. Any movement or organization that threatened disorder in the body politic was ruthlessly suppressed. We have seen that prior to the year 250 the Roman government had not endeavored to destroy Christianity. Only when the popular hostility to the Christians caused public disturbances or raised a hue and cry did the government take a hand. This was true even in the case of Septimius Severus who was struck by the existing conditions which he observed on a tour through the east. From the point of view of the imperial government the Christians must have been, on the whole, very desirable citizens. They were quiet, industrious, prosperous and paid their taxes.[2] No emperor in his right mind would undertake

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1.Gibbon,E.,op.cit. Vol.I.p.186.
2.Paul,Romans,XIII.7. Justin,I Apol.17. Tertullian,de Idol. 15,Scorp.14,Apol.42.

their extermination or feel called upon to destroy their organization, which fostered such desirable citizens, without great provocation. This provocation did not arise until the economic crisis of the middle of the third century; at the same time when Christianity had become a veritable state within a state and would appear to any Roman to be a positive political danger. These two factors go a long way to explain the outbreak of the first general persecutions at the middle of the third century. The empire had to be united internally in order to recuperate its strength and be able to withstand the external foes.

II. The persecution of Decius.

(a) Decius was a Roman of the old school. The emperors who had preceded him had been syncretistic orientalists. Consequently the empire, according to Decius, was radically in need of reform. Decius had the typical Roman attitude with regard to the relation of the state to the old Roman gods which was given clear expression by Dio Cassius.[1] The prosperity of the state had been occasioned by and was entirely dependent upon the favor of the traditional gods. If the empire had fallen upon evil days it must be because of the displeasure of the gods. Hence one of the first things that Decius undertook was religious reform. There is indication also of a general religious revival at this time.[2] Decius decided that the difficulty with the empire was the very

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1. Dio Cassius, Roman History, LII.36.
2. Nock, A.D., A diis electa, Harvard Theol. Rev. 23:251-254.

obvious circumstance that the ancient traditional gods had been almost forgotten, with the result that their displeasure had caused them to withdraw their supernatural protection and thus allowed the empire to approach collapse. Naturally the most effective way to remedy the situation would be to reinvigorate the neglected worship and win back the favor of the gods. This is just what he attempted to do. It was a religious action in its conception and execution. But, and this is the vital point that we wish to bring out, this action was not instigated by any personal pious religious devotion on the part of Decius but by the threatening economic ruin of the empire. The primary and fundamental cause of the imperial action taken by Decius was economic. It does not matter in the least whether he was conscious of that fact or not. Decius saw that unless forces could be assembled that would enable him to combat effectively the threatening dissolution, within and without, the empire would collapse. This situation impelled him to take reform action which with reference to the Christians meant persecution.

(b) How much did the prospect of immediate financial returns to be derived from the confiscation of the property of those who would refuse to conform operate in the motivation of the emperor? This is a moot question that can never be satisfactorily answered but there are some considerations that will clarify the problem appreciably.

In the first place there is much satisfactory evidence to show that all of the property of the Christians who were condemned to death, banished, or fled was confiscated by the

imperial authorities for the use of the state.[1] It does not appear that the number of those who were condemned to death was large, but the indications are that the exiles were quite numerous.[2] Considering the general prosperity of the Christians which has already been established it is quite probable that the financial returns from such confiscations may have been large.

This leads us to a discussion of the policy of Decius with regard to confiscations. It had been the policy of the Roman government to confiscate all of the property of persons subjected to capital punishment[3] but in common practice portions more or less definite and fixed had been allotted to the descendants.[4] In the matter of banishment the attitude of the government had been much more lenient. In case the charge included something of a treasonable nature total confiscation might ensue[5] but the commonly established practice in case of banishment was to confiscate either none at all or only a certain portion, the remainder being left in the hands of the individual himself or going to his family.[6] Judging from the material that is available and cited above Decius not only

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1. Cyprian, de Lapsis, 2, 3, 10-12, 35, Ep. XIII.2(19), XVIII(24), XIX (25), LIII.4(57), LXVIII.4(66), ad Demet.12, de Bono Patientiae, 12. Eusebius, H.E. VII.xi.18. Arnobius, adv.Nat.I.26.
2. Cyprian, Ep. XX.4(21), LI.13(55), LV.4(58).
3. Digest of Justinian, XXVIII.i.8:4. Eusebius, H.E. VI.ii.13. Humbert, Confiscatio, Daremberg et Saglio, Dictionnaire des Antiquités.
4. Digest, XLVIII.xx.
5. Tacitus, Annals, III.1.6, lxviii.3, XII.xxii.2,3. Humbert, Exsilium, op.cit.
6. Digest, XLVIII, xix.38:8, xx.1, xxii.1, 4. Tacitus, Annals, IV.xxi. 5, xx, 2, 3, III.xxiii.3, xvii.8, XV.lxxi.7. Plinius, Epist. IV.11. Humbert, Exsilium, op.cit.

confiscated all of the property of those who were sentenced to capital punishment but invariably seized all of the property he could discover of those who had fled from persecution or had been banished. As M. Allard and Mr. Gregg state[1] this would seem to show that Decius made the laws of confiscation much more severe than they had been before or at least so applied them. But this conclusion must not be too hastily drawn for it is to be remembered that the refusal of the Christians to sacrifice to the gods of the Roman state constituted a treasonable act in the eyes of the government and thus lay the recusants liable to the extreme of the law. Then again, confiscations on mere pretexts had been increasing space during the third century with the definite purpose of replenishing the depleted imperial treasury[2] and had been carried on in wholesale fashion by Maximinus.[3] Consequently Decius would hardly be conscious of any special or extraordinary measure in confiscating the entire possessions of any recusant member of the empire. We do not believe that it can be established that the matter of confiscation constituted any appreciable motive in his instigation of persecution but, of course, it may be confidently assumed that he would be nothing loath to make use of all such opportunities to fill the empty coffers of the state. He must have been fully aware of the prosperity of the Christians.

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1. Allard, P., Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle (Paris, 1905), p.359. Gregg, J.A.F., The Decian Persecution (London, 1897), p.88.
2. Rostovtzeff, M., op.cit. pp.333-341, 367-369, 395-411.
3. Rostovtzeff, M., op.cit. pp.398-403.

There is another phase in the action of Decius that deserves to be considered in this connection. We have already pointed out that martyrdoms were not numerous during this persecution and this fact has significance in two ways. In the first place it indicates that Decius was not obsessed with the opportunity that would have been offered for confiscations by the wholesale execution of those who refused to obey his edict. In the second place it shows an appreciation on the part of the emperor of the economic loss that would have been incurred by unrestrained executions. It is not unreasonable to impute such understanding to Decius since it is known that others realized the situation.[1] Decius had no desire to suppress Christianity by means of bloodshed and thus further to jeopardize the economic welfare of the empire.

III. The persecution of Gallus.

The persecution that took place during the reign of the emperor Gallus needs only a passing mention in this connection. It was occasioned by a disastrous plague which spread throughout the empire and carried off whole sections of the population.[2] This is an example of persecution caused by superstition which looked upon natural calamities as the consequence of the anger of the gods. Its resultant depopulation which depleted the economic resources of the empire very likely played a part in the instigation of the

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1. Tertullian, Apol. 44.
2. Eusebius, H.E. VII.1. Pontius, Vita Cae. Cyp. 9. Cyprian, Ep. LIII(57), LIV.6(59), LV.7(58), LVI(60), ad Demet. 5,7.

persecution by the emperor. It is to be observed that, as was the case with Decius, the emperor did not directly issue an edict against Christianity as such but simply ordered that all of the citizens of the empire should offer sacrifice to the gods in order that they might be appeased. The Christians were the only ones who would refuse to conform and hence it amounted to a Christian persecution.

IV. The persecution of Valerian.

(a) Valerian was a man of the same stamp and attitudes as Decius and the same arguments offered concerning the motivation of Decius apply in the case of Valerian. We refer the reader to that discussion as we feel that the point of view there emphasized is vital to a true understanding of the motivation of these two major persecutions. However, the action of Valerian is a little more difficult to understand because he took no action against the religious recusants of the empire for some years. We have only conjecture to guide us in this difficulty but again the economic interpretation comes to our assistance. While Valerian was too busy with external matters concerning the empire to pay much attention to the internal affairs during the early years of his reign, yet he could have continued the persecuting policy of Decius if he had seen fit. It will be permissible to suggest that Valerian observed that instead of the condition of the empire improving after the policy of Decius and Gallus had been put into execution the situation had continued to grow worse. He may possibly have decided that the policy was in error and

so determined to abandon it. With what result? The economic status of the empire continued on the downward grade! What was to be done? We must not forget that Valerian, like Decius, would be firmly convinced that the welfare of the empire was dependent upon the favor of the gods. Perhaps, Valerian may have reasoned, the lack of improvement in the empire was due not to the policy of Decius but to its ineffectiveness! Possibly a more stringent execution would produce results. The consequence was that he issued an edict which differed from that of Decius chiefly in this respect: that is was aimed directly at the Christian organization itself.

(b) How far Valerian may have been influenced by his minister of finance, Macrianus, furnishes an interesting speculation but gets us nowhere. Dionysius attributes almost the entire motivation of the persecution to the influence of Macrianus[1] and this influence is accepted by Mr. Healy[2] but his argument is not very convincing. His argument for the economic influence upon Valerian is more assuring.[3] We can readily see how his financial secretary would exert much influence on his state policies but the economic situation must have been much more influential than the failures of Macrianus in the practice of his magical arts.

(c) The confiscations that occurred constitute a further problem in the persecutions of Valerian. In this connection it is important to bear in mind that two edicts were

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1. Eusebius, H.E. VII.10.
2. Healy, P.J., The Valerian Persecution (Boston, 1905), pp.109-123.
3. Healy, P.J., op.cit. p.122

issued by Valerian about a year apart which contain important variations. M. Allard has failed to take due account of that fact in his treatment of the Valerian persecutions. He is too anxious to impute a direct economic motive to Valerian.[1] The first edict of Valerian aimed at crippling the Christian organization by sending the bishops into exile and forbidding all Christian assemblies. No general confiscations or bloodshed was called for. Certainly Valerian, as well as Decius, had no desire to kill off unnecessary numbers of the population and thus endanger the already tottering resources of the empire;it can hardly be imagined that any Roman emperor would hesitate to shed blood through any feeling of human compassion. But the first edict of Valerian failed signally to effect the desired reform. The bishops could direct their flocks almost as well from exile as from their home headquarters and the Christians continued to assemble for their meetings of worship in spite of the danger resulting from the interdict. The outcome was a second edict more drastic than the first. It specified the recall and execution of the bishops along with other members of the clergy; senators and other laymen of high rank were to be degraded, their property confiscated, and later executed if they persisted as recusants; matrons were to be deprived and banished; the Christian servants in the household and employ of the emperor were to be deprived of their property and sent in chains to work on the imperial estates.

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1. Allard, P., Les dernière persécutions du troisième siècle (Paris, 1907) pp. 36-57. Le christianism et l'empire romain (Paris, 1897), pp. 107-110.

The former edict against the assembling of Christians was still in force and its execution was continued. The corporate property and funds of the church were confiscated. That there is a strong economic element here can easily be perceived but how far it was an active factor in motivating the persecution is quite another matter. M.Allard makes much of the desire of Valerian to seize the wealth of the individual Christians and the corporate property and funds of the church. But if this was an important factor it did not become effective until the second edict. The first edict was not only bloodless but without important confiscations. We feel that this inconsistency in the action of Valerian cannot be allowed. His primary motive, fired, it is important to remember, by the economic crisis of the empire, was to crush the power of the Christians by destroying its organization. Having failed in his first attempt he either had to abandon his efforts altogether or take more stringent measures. He adopted the latter course and sought to disable the recalcitrant body by destroying its material resources and depriving it of both its clerical and lay leadership. This move showed real acumen but he did not appreciate the inherent power of Christianity. An important part of his policy was to cripple the organization economically and it can be readily granted that he would not bemoan the increase that might come thereby to the imperial treasury. Many of the Christians were wealthy as Valerian must have known and he aimed at the wealthiest. The Christian community also had considerable property by this time although most of it must not have been readily convertible. In his earlier

work[1] M.Allard asserts that an enormous mass of wealth was thus acquired by Valerian for the imperial coffers but he fails to give us anything but possibilities in substantiation of this claim. In his last work on the persecutions[2] he admits that we know "practically nothing" about the extent of these confiscations. Hence any ascription of a definite motive of confiscation to Valerian on this basis is very precarious. Two further items may be adduced in this connection. According to Roman law[3] the members of an illicit collegia that had been dissolved were to have the privilege of dividing the property, if any, among themselves. This was not allowed by Valerian in connection with Christianity. But this matter can easily be overemphasized. Even if Valerian did intentionally violate common practice he would not be conscience-stricken in the least. He was seeking to destroy Christianity and it would have been quite foolish to have distributed among the members any funds he may have discovered. It is not necessary to assume that he was motivated by any special avarice in order to comprehend the action which he took. The other item is the story of the martyrdom of St. Lawrence.[4] This story seems to have considerable foundation and is not inherently improbable but dependence cannot be placed upon details and to assert the avariciousness of Valerian on the basis of it is

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1. Allard, P., Les dernière persécutions du troisième siècle (Paris, 1907), pp.93-113.
2. Allard, P., Ten Lectures on the Martyrs (London, 1907), p.99.
3. Digest, XLVII.xxii.3.
4. Ambrose, de Officiis, I.42, II.28. Prudentius, Peri Stephanon, III.

unwarranted. We find ourselves, therefore, in practically the same position with regard to Valerian as we are with regard to Decius. No direct economic motive can be imputed to either of these emperors.

However, we wish to reiterate emphatically the interpretation which we have already expounded: that economic factors were fundamental in the instigation of all of these imperial persecutions. While we do not agree with those writers who point to the confiscations of these emperors as indicating their avariciousness, we insist that their action can be explained only on the basis of economic considerations. The economic catacylsm which threatened the Roman Empire in the middle of the third century has been indicated in the Introduction and is well known to all students of Roman history. This, and this alone, constitutes the major explanation for the edicts of Decius and Valerian. They both sought, with much anxiety, to avert the impending economic ruin. Apart from this element the first universal persecutions of Christianity remain genuine enigmas. The fact that these emperors adopted religious methods for accomplishing their purpose is satisfactorily explained, as already pointed out, by the superstitious warp and woof of ancient society. The provocation, therefore, of the first general imperial persecutions of Christianity was economic.

V. <u>The edict of Gallienus</u>.

Strictly speaking the edict of Gallienus falls without the range of this treatise as it was an edict of toleration

and not of persecution but it forms a fitting climax to our discussion and so will be included. The content of the edict is preserved for us by Eusebius.[1] The Christians were to be once more allowed to assemble, their corporate property restored and they were to be protected from molestation. One question only is pertinent for our purpose: Why did Gallienus reverse the edict of his father? No satisfactory answer can be given, especially on the basis of the customary practice of mercilessly maligning the character of Gallienus. If we accept, even to a limited extent, the defense of the statesmanship of Gallienus urged by M.Homo[2] it will help us to understand the action which he took. Valerian, his father, had tried a soft answer but the wrath had not been turned away from the empire. Then he had tried two measures of repression, the second more drastic than the first, and both had failed. The Christians were still powerful and the empire was worse off than ever. Valerian himself was enduring an ignominious captivity. Might not Gallienus have observed that if toleration was useless repression was worse than useless for it simply piled up disasters and internal ruptures when the empire was already at the breaking point. If Gallienus had given the matter no thought why did he take any action

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1. Eusebius, H.E., VII.13. How far this rescript of Gallienus was a genuine edict of toleration and what the consequent status of Christianity was is a moot question, but that problem is of minor importance in this connection. The vital point is merely that Gallienus took some favorable action with regard to Christianity. More than that is non-essential to the validity of our argument.
2. Homo, L., L'Empereur Gallien. Revue Historique. 113:1-22, 225-267.

at all? The evidence that he was influenced by his wife is quite unsatisfactory.[1] If his attitude had been one of complete indifference he would simply have done nothing and so allowed the former edicts to be executed or to fall into abeyance wherever they would. Instead he took definite action in favor of Christianity. Most of this is mere conjecture of course but if guesses are worth anything historically our guess is that economic factors played their customary rôle.

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1. Healy, P.J., op.cit. p.271.

CONCLUSIONS

(a) Sufficient has already been said concerning the character of the persecutions prior to 250 A.D. We have also attempted to show that economic factors were of primary importance in arousing popular hostility to Christianity all through this period. Many factors entered into the total causation of the popular hatred but the smoldering resentment always present in the popular mind seems to have ever needed some immediate circumstance to inflame it. These inflaming sparks were often economic. The book of Revelation describes the persecutor as the local priest.[1] No one could buy or sell unless he had the "mark". In the persecution under Trajan, which has been referred to before, the inciting factor seems to have been the temple authorities and others whose income had been cut off or at least seriously curtailed. This is an isolated example so far as our specific historical records go but historians of the persecutions are almost unanimous in agreeing that it is a true picture of what occurred over and over again: persecution incited by temple authorities whose economic welfare was endangered or destroyed. It has been suggested by an historian of the eighteenth century that rapacious magistrates were induced by the edict of Septimius Severus to persecute the poorer Christians in order that the richer might be induced to purchase their immunity at an expensive rate.[2] This seems to be a mere conjecture and so doesn't count

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1.John, Revelation, XIII.11-18.
2.Mosheim, J.L., Ecclesiastical History (London, 1842), p.123.

for much. But more positive evidence is given by Cyprian[1] when he describes severe local persecutions which occurred in Pontus and Cappadocia in the time of Alexander Severus due to many and disastrous earthquakes. Earthquakes are economic disasters and as such constitute evidence for the economic instigation of persecutions. Considerable material has already been presented in regard to public disasters as the causation of persecution and all of the same is applicable in this connection. Dionysius gives us an interesting account, in this regard, of the persecution which broke out in Alexandria.[2] The instigator was a pagan soothsayer who apparently had some personal grievance against the Christians and had no difficulty in stirring up an angry mob which soon took matters into their own hands and pillaged the Christians ruthlessly, appropriating the more valuable possessions and burning cheaper articles. The infuriated mob was seeking vengeance and pecuniary matters weighed heavily in the scales.

(b) If economic factors were prominent in instigating general outbreaks against the Christians the evidence is even more convincing with regard to individual prosecutions. The two persecutions of Paul recorded in Acts 16:19 and 19: 23-41 were both definitely aroused by the interference of his propaganda with the economic interests of heathen contemporaries. Justin Martyr tells us that his rival philosopher, Crescens, was also his bitter enemy[3] and he anticipated dire

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1.Cyprian,Ep.LXXIV.10(75).
2.Eusebius,H.E.VI.xli.1,2,5.
3.Justin,II.Apol.3.

consequences. Apparently Justin's competition was a little too keen. Tatian, a contemporary of Justin, tells us that Justin's death was indeed due to the machinations of Crescens and that he himself was plotted against by the same man.[1] Eusebius reiterates this explanation.[2] Eusebius also tells us of a certain soldier by the name of Marinus who, when in line for promotion, was informed against as a Christian by another who claimed the promotion in his stead.[3] In the martyrdom of the senator Apollonius[4] we are given no hint of the motive but it is not unlikely that the delator hoped to receive a portion of the condemned man's property. We know from several sources that this motive was an important factor in the prosecution of many persons in the second century, not only of Christians but of various unfortunate individuals in Roman society. Tacitus informs us that baneful effects of laws passed in the first century A.D. by which certain generous allocations of the condemneds' property were given to the successful delators were persistent and serious.[5] This sheds light upon certain conditions in the Christian situation. Athenagoras[6] tells us of Christians who were "slaughtered at the instigation of false accusers" who were not content with mere confiscation. Of course it is to be borne in mind that these accusers were "false" only from the Christians' point

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1. Tatian, Or. ad Grae. 19. Whether his information was first-hand or mere hearsay seems uncertain.
2. Eusebius, H.E. IV.xvi.1,2.
3. Eusebius, H.E. VII.xv.2.
4. Eusebius, H.E. V.xxi.2-5.
5. Tacitus, Annals, IV.xxx.4,5, XVI.xxxiii.4.
6. Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christ. 1.

of view. Also in the rescript of Hadrian to Fundanus[1] it is apparent that there had been many accusations of Christians through mere calumny. The prospect of sharing in the condemned person's property must have figured largely in these cases. Clement of Alexandria suggests this in one of his treatises[2] and Melito tells us definitely of numerous persecutions motivated by the spoliation of the property of Christians by delators.[3]

We have attempted to establish two propositions: (1) That economic factors were of primary importance in the causation of popular hostility to Christianity which was almost invariably the sole instigating agent in the persecutions prior to the year 250 A.D. (2) That the final spark that fired the smoldering resentment and caused it to burst forth in opposition to the Christians was often, if not almost universally, economic. Without the economic factors which entered into the causes of popular fury and the economic motives which caused it to burst forth how bitter or extensive would have been the persecutions of the first two centuries of Christian propaganda? The suggestion, at least, is pertinent that persecution might very seldom have become open or corporeal. After the middle of the third century it

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1. Eusebius, H.E. IV.ix.1-3. The authenticity of this rescript has been called in question at various times. Material pro and con with bibliography is available in the following: Canfield, L.H., The Early Persecutions of the Christians (N.Y.1913), pp.103-118,215. Merrill, E.T., Essays in Early Christian History (London, 1924), pp.202-216. Cabrol, Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne. Tome IV.col.2155-2159.
2. Clement, Q. dives sal.25.
3. Eusebius, H.E. IV.xxvi.5.

is very improbable that persecution would ever have occurred had it not been for imperial action, for a modus vivendi had been very largely established between the new religious society and the pagan social world.

(c) In drawing our conclusions concerning the imperial actions of the middle of the third century it must be borne in mind that no dogmatic assertions are possible. We recognize the fact that there was a fundamental conflict between the Christian society and the Roman state altogether apart from any economic considerations. The two could not continue to exist side by side indefinitely without some mutual understanding. Conflict or co-operation was inevitable. This situation was perceived in a certain measure by Septimius Severus and must have been clearly evident to both Decius and Valerian. Valerian shows his lucid appreciation of the situation by the method he employed to stamp out the obnoxious sect; he struck at an organization and not at masses of the population. But the Roman government never liked to be unpopular in the execution of its laws and by the middle of the third century action against the Christians was rapidly becoming unpopular. It necessitated great provocation for the Roman government to take repeated and drastic action against the growing and powerfully influential body of Christians, a group who were, on the whole, loyal citizens and good taxpayers. This provocation appeared in the economic crisis of the empire. Something had to be done. On the other hand if the empire had continued to prosper as in the days of Augustus or the Antonines, when Christianity was an illicit but "tolerated"

religion, would the emperors ever have taken more drastic measures against Christianity than they did in the first two centuries? Although we recognize the fundamental antagonism between Christianity and the Roman state (which might ultimately have caused general persecutions), we may suggest with some confidence that, had the economic crisis of the third century not overtaken the empire for another one hundred years, or even seventy-five, and Christianity had continued, as it did, to permeate society, it is very doubtful whether even such an emperor as Decius would have attempted or felt called upon to suppress so peaceful and powerful a group as the Christians so long as the empire seemed to be running smoothly. In other words, a <u>modus vivendi</u> in all probability would have been established between the church and the state without severe hostilities even as it had already been established in large measure in the social and intellectual realms and did become an actuality in the political realm in the days of Constantine.

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